CHILD-STUDY—OBSERVATION OF CHILDREN.

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL AT WORCESTER, MASS.

PAMPHLET B.

Approved by

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STATE NORMAL SCHOOL AT WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS.

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INCEPTION. — In the catalogue of the school is published the following statement: — "The school is much indebted to Dr. G. Stanley Hall for a suggestion, made as long ago as 1884, that the study of psychology might be pursued in part by the original observation of children. From his idea as a starting point, a scheme for this purpose has been worked out and adopted as a permanent part of the school curriculum." *The Pedagogical Seminary*, Vol. 1, No. 2, contains an article by Dr. W. H. Burnham in which is found this estimate: — "As a means of bringing the young teacher into relations of interest and sympathy with children this work can hardly be commended too highly."

What is this plan? At the outset it may be well to make plain what it is not.

(1) We do not use our pupils to gather material to illustrate or develop some line of investigation of our own, or of any specialist.

(2) We do not make it a class exercise.

(3) It is not assigned, and there are individuals who never pass in a record. Its importance is dwelt on, and most of the few laggards are stimulated to do something; but only because it is "in the air."

What it is. An attempt to cultivate the habit of sympathetic observation of children, in the belief that having to do with a child is a sure and safe way to bring out the latent and uncritical abilities of the brevet teacher. And this faith is justified. The greater part find a pleasure in telling the story, and a fair number become deeply interested in the occupation. Again and again we are surprised by finding how few of our pupils belong to

families in which there are little children, and it is clearly manifest that this work awakens curiosity concerning the phenomena of child-nature, excites intelligent sympathy with children, and contributes to skill in discipline and instruction. Graduates and apprentices give abundant testimony on all these points. When the nature of the work is explained to the school, great emphasis is placed upon the necessity of having the records genuine beyond all possibility of question; of having them consist of a simple, concise statement of what the child does or says, without comment by the writer; of making both the observation and the record without the knowledge of the child; and of noting the usual, rather than the unusual, conduct of the individuals observed. It is profitable to learn how multiform is this usual conduct. In order that the field shall be wide we take care to lay no preponderance on any line of observation, though for convenience in classification, blanks of seven colors are provided for the records. (See "wing-frame" 4, and volume of specimen records.) White paper is used for such observations as students make themselves; red for well-attested ones reported by others; yellow for reminiscences of their own childhood; canary for language; green for mention of whatever they read on the subject; blue for exceptional or defective children; and chocolate for observations that extend continuously over a definite period of time. Of these, green is rarely used, blue and chocolate seldom, yellow and canary often, and white more than all others combined. Each blank has the following heading: —

[STATE NORMAL SCHOOL AT WORCESTER.]

STUDY OF CHILDREN.

"I worked on true Baconian principles, and without any theory collected facts on a wholesale scale. . . ." — *Darwin, Autobiography.*

1. Date, _____
2. Observer's name, _____ age, _____
   P. O. address, _____
3. Name (or initials) of person (child) observed, _____
   sex, _____; nationality, _____; age (yrs. and mos.), _____
4. Length of time between making the observation and recording it, _____

RECORD: _____

(A collection of all the blanks is shown in "wing-frame" 4.)

From the records passed in a few are selected from time to time and placed where they may be read by all who care for them. How far these serve as stimulus and example is not known; but every day, not excepting the first day of the term, brings its supply of records, even though the subject may not have been explicitly mentioned for months. It is indeed the most nearly self-sustaining exercise in the school. To such as ask are issued blank books in which to enter serial records of the same child, a sort of diary; and these are taken as a rule by pupils with greatest or exceptional opportunities.

Systematic instruction in psychology is aided, both in the way of preparation and supplement, by this additional study. Pupils are thus furnished at the outset with facts of their own observation, which serve as elementary material for scientific classification and study; they have a habit of observing certain classes of phenomena, and have received suggestions and cautions that are of service to them in other departments; they are able to pass more easily to mental science, because they have learned that that, as well as natural science, can be pursued by an objective method; they have an already awakened and active interest in the subject, that gives them pleasure in learning general principles, sometimes in part known by their own observations; and, moreover, they attach a different value to a text-book, which they see is a natural outgrowth of an experience like their own.

As all students are free to make observations, some records have no value apart from the wholesome endeavor that made them; but a progress in the significance of the things noticed and in the manner of recording them is apparent. During the latter part of a term the proportion of significant and valuable papers is greater than during the first part. All papers are carefully preserved (about two thousand have been collected each year) and it is hoped that they may be of value to students of child-nature; but the primary object of collecting them is the training of prospective teachers, and so highly does the

work commend itself as a means to this end, that, if nothing ulterior to this is gained, complete satisfaction and no disappointment will be experienced.

Those who may desire a fuller exposition of the method and its results are referred to *The Pedagogical Seminary* (Clark University), Vol. I., No. 2 and Vol. II., No. 3; *The Educational Review* for December, 1893; also, the volume published under the auspices of our Graduate's Association, entitled "Child Observations. First series: Imitation and Allied Activities." Boston: D. C. Heath & Co.; *Educational Review* for May, 1898.

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL AT WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS.

PAMPHLET C.

"LARGER" KINDERGARTEN MATERIAL.

In *The Pedagogical Seminary* for October, 1894, there appeared an article by John A. Hancock, Fellow in Pedagogy, Clark University, entitled "A Preliminary Study of Motor Ability." The article was little more than a careful report of a series of tests made by Mr. Hancock, and certain teachers under his direction, upon children of kindergarten and primary school ages, to determine the limits of stability in various forms of muscular control. The results of these tests, and of similar investigations made by other students of child nature, were such as to raise the question in the minds of many thoughtful teachers whether young children were not being forced beyond their capacity by the fineness and complexity of the muscular adjustments required of them in their earliest school exercises; and whether such forcing, if it existed, did not work grave harm to the nervous system of the child? It seemed as if we all might have fallen unawares into the mistake of thinking that because the child is little he should have small things to work and play with — small balls to toss and catch, small dolls to dress, small figures and letters to make, and small pencils to make them with, etc. The conclusions of Mr. Hancock, however, pointed unmistakably in the opposite direction. "Kindergarten work," he said, "generally is too fine. Too great precision, involving delicate and complex co-ordinations in pasting, weaving, folding, pricking and sewing, is insisted on. Occupations and games for young children should be of a nature that will involve large muscles and movements."

He found that the motor control in children in the first year of school life is from one-third to one-sixth that of adults!

In order to make a practical application and a further test of these conclusions along a somewhat different line of approach, the experiment was begun of offering to the children in the kindergarten of the State Normal School at Worcester, Massachusetts, a choice between the "material" of the usual size and the same material much larger — roughly speaking, about twice the ordinary linear dimensions. This experiment was begun in October, 1895, and the choice of each child was recorded daily for a full school year, no word or intimation being ever given to the children to influence their preference, or even to suggest that there was any difference in the material. Not quite enough of the material was provided *of either size* to go round, so that a few children each day might be obliged to take what was left, whether they preferred it or not.

The result from beginning to end was unequivocal and significant. The children preferred by a constant and decisive majority the larger material. They also showed more skill and facility in manipulating it. Whatever the reasons for their preference, there was no doubt whatever about the fact.

The larger material has been retained as a regular feature of our kindergarten ever since, not to the exclusion of the smaller, but along with it, open to the choice of every child. (See "wing-frame" 5, and the exhibit in the cabinet "show-case.") It has never driven the smaller out of the field, nor is it invariably chosen by the same child, but it has maintained its ascendancy, and our conviction is that its withdrawal from use would be a serious disadvantage and deprivation to the children.

From the beginning made here nine years ago, the use of this new material has spread somewhat widely, so that it is not uncommon to find it here and there, but so far as we know, it has not been exclusively "adopted" anywhere, nor do we see any reason why it should be. Its introduction was opposed at first — perhaps is still — by the class of conservative kindergartners who cling to traditional

"LARGER" AND SMALLER MATERIAL IN USE.

forms and methods, and also perhaps by a few persons who have vested interests in the manufacture and sale of the more usual size. It is more bulky, and consequently requires more room for its free use, and it costs more than the smaller material. But experience compels us to believe that it is more physiological and more in harmony with the capacities and instincts of little children than the earlier material — certainly far better than strict confinement to the earlier material.